

Fairfax County, Virginia

Community Council on Homelessness

**ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

March 7, 2005

Linda Wimpey, Chair
Jane Kornblut, Vice-Chair

Community Council on Homelessness

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Presented by Linda Wimpey, Chair, and Jane Kornblut, Vice Chair

Good morning, Chairman Connolly and members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and County Executive Griffin. Thank you for the opportunity to present this Message -- our first as the Community Council on Homelessness. You will remember that last year the Homeless Oversight Committee set forth in its annual message to you a new, more effective structure for addressing homelessness and related affordable housing issues. This restructuring was the result of an extensive community engagement lasting several months last spring. The restructuring merged two functions, the Homeless Oversight Committee and the Continuum of Care Planning Process into a revised system, the Community Planning Collaborative on Homelessness.

The revised system consolidated the leadership functions in the Community Council on Homelessness. We are responsible for providing governance and leadership for the overall process. The Council has five standing committees that are working to develop resources for delivery of effective homeless services in our community.

One of the first acts of the Council was to define our mission. We agreed that it is to provide leadership to prevent and end homelessness in Fairfax-Falls Church. We believe all people have a right to a safe, affordable place to live. No small task, but an achievable one in this caring and affluent community, if we think creatively and work together. We endorse the concept that Board members have expressed of the value of living in a diverse community.

We want to thank Chairman Connolly for making affordable housing one of his six priorities. His leadership has been instrumental in making affordable housing a high priority public policy issue. Homelessness and affordable housing are inextricably interwoven and in the end, if we

are to succeed in ending homelessness, as a community we must provide safe, affordable housing.

The Council has identified three priorities, not in any particular order, and one challenge to present to you for the coming year.

A dedicated revenue source for affordable housing

Understanding the connection between homelessness and affordable housing, one of the very first policy actions that the Council took was to endorse wholeheartedly the recommendation of the Affordable Housing Preservation Action Committee to dedicate one penny of the real estate tax rate to preservation of affordable housing. This should also include new development as needed. This is an essential first step in ensuring that not-for-profit developers can compete in the market and be able to preserve and develop more affordable housing for the lower income members of our community. We urge you to include this in the FY2006 budget and beyond. We also believe that it is critical for the Board to ensure that a clear plan and accountability for use of these funds is established.

The needs of homeless medically frail adults and children

Last year in response to a request by the Homeless Oversight Committee, the Board appointed a special committee to make recommendations for responding to this need. The Special Committee has completed its work and is presenting its recommendations to various appointed councils and committees such as the Council on Homelessness for input before bringing it to you later this spring.

Those who are homeless and also have major medical issues face even greater challenges because of these co-occurring situations. The recommendations of the Special Committee will make significant strides in addressing some of the needs of this population and we urge you to support their recommendations when they are presented. But again, the problems of this subpopulation would be minimized significantly if they were living in affordable housing, rather than in shelters or on the streets. And their general health would be far better if they were housed, since homelessness only increases the chance and severity of medical problems.

The need for SROs

SRO is housing for single adults in buildings with small, affordable efficiency apartments. SROs have been successfully developed throughout the country as a way of providing, safe, affordable housing for single adults. Within Fairfax County, SROs would provide housing for entry level or service industry employees, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, in the past two years, the inventory of efficiency rental units in the County has decreased by more than 150 units, making this need even more critical.

We strongly urge the Board of Supervisors to endorse SROs as a type of housing appropriate for and needed in Fairfax County to meet the needs of our lowest income, single adult residents. We also encourage the Board to make the process of developing SROs easier. Specifically, the Council recommends that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Planning and Zoning to develop an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance enabling development of the SRO housing model in Fairfax County as a number one priority. We also recommend that the development process be “green-taped” or streamlined so as to reduce obstacles and expedite the Fairfax County plan review and permitting processes.

Finally, we challenge the Board to provide County land – through surplus school property, at Laurel Hill, or other unused land – for the development of at least one SRO in FY2006. All of us are well aware of the exorbitant cost of land throughout the County. These costs are a major barrier to the development of any new housing other than high cost housing. An SRO is a reasonable and effective way to meet one affordable housing need. We encourage the Board to continue to show its leadership in the area of affordable housing by this concrete action.

Again, we want to thank Chairman Connolly and the entire Board for your commitment to affordable housing. We are blessed with a good economy and leadership in this area. The problem of homelessness is significant but solvable through goodwill, creativity, and the continued support of the Board. The Council looks forward to continuing to work with the Board and with the community at large to prevent and end homeless so that all residents of Fairfax County have a safe, affordable place to live.

FACTS

- Homelessness has remained consistently high during the past six years:

Year	2000	2,013 total homeless
Year	2001	1,935 total homeless
Year	2002	2,067 total homeless
Year	2003	1,944 total homeless
Year	2004	1,926 total homeless
Year	2005	1,949 total homeless

- A survey conducted on January 26, 2005, of all known homeless county residents identified a homeless population of 1,949 persons: 800 single individuals, and 422 adults with 727 children in 333 homeless families. Average family size was 3.45. These numbers do not account for families and individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless, or who live in doubled- or tripled-up housing situations.
- The waiting list for the family shelters continued to average 50 - 60 families or more during the past year, but these shelters can only accommodate about 35 families at one time. It still takes up to three months to get into a family shelter. The new Katherine K. Hanley family shelter will help to address this need.
- The County has continued to house a limited number of families in motels. This is an expensive and undesirable alternative to shelter, but may be the only option available in a crisis.
- The number of homeless single individuals is about the same as last year, but the housing challenges for working singles and persons with disabilities are daunting. Rent for an efficiency apartment was \$841 per month in January 2004, with only 1200 such units available, a decrease of 70 from January 2003. Of the 800 single individuals, 236 are in programs providing permanent ongoing supports, but 564 are "literally homeless" - living on the street, in shelters or in transitional housing.
- The overall cost of market housing in rental complexes has remained high. The two-bedroom rent was \$1,210 in January 2004, while the overall average rent was \$1,157 and the overall vacancy rate was 5.8%. Although these figures reflect minimal change from 2003, and the number of rental complex units increased by 1,637, there continues to be a tight market for more affordable units.
- There is mixed news in the County's Housing Choice Voucher Program. The program has remained fully leased up since October 2002, but the lack of additional vouchers during the past year meant that homeless families in shelters and transitional housing could not readily move to permanent stable housing. While this situation has begun to improve due to increased turnover in the program, the proposed FY 2006 HUD budget includes an 11 percent reduction in funding spread over many programs.

Community Planning Collaborative on Homelessness

Community Council on Homelessness

Excerpt of By-Laws on Background, Mission, and Functions

Article I. Background

The Community Planning Collaborative on Homelessness is a process that was established in 2004 to ensure that the County and the community support policies, programs, and services that prevent homelessness and meet the needs of those families and individuals who become homeless. The Collaborative encompasses two major bodies, the Council and the Forum. The Council is the leadership component that provides governance and guidance for the community process. The Forum involves all parties in the community who have an interest in or provide services related to addressing homelessness and ensures that the Collaborative is a consensus driven process. Together the Council and the Forum conduct the necessary business and work to support the broad purposes of the Collaborative.

Article II. Mission

The Community Council on Homelessness provides leadership to prevent and end homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church Area.

Article III. Functions

- Provide oversight and governance to the community planning process.
- Educate and advocate for appropriate policies, programs, and services to best address homelessness.
- With input from the Community Forum on Homelessness, adopt annual goals and objectives.
- Provide direction to standing committees to ensure that their work supports the mission of the Council.
- Ensure coordination and communication with and among the standing committees.
- Develop strategies to address resource issues to prevent and end homelessness.
- Promote best practices, encourage training, monitor performance, resolve problems, and establish a project prioritization process that best reflects the needs of the community.
- Use data to assess the availability of resources, identify gaps, and forecast future needs to guide decision-making.
- Identify opportunities and encourage the development of new programs, initiatives, and pilot projects that will provide housing and needed services to families and individuals who have become homeless or are becoming homeless in our community.
- Provide an annual report to the Board of Supervisors on the state of homelessness.
- Maintain representation and linkage to other County boards and committees to ensure that issues and concerns affecting homeless persons are considered in decisions about services and programs.

COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS STATEMENT OF VALUES

These values inform and guide the council as it moves toward accomplishing its mission and vision.

- We value everyone in our community, recognizing the right of all people to have a safe, affordable place in which to live.
- We value diversity, believing that communities are strengthened when people connect across differences.
- We value excellence and are committed to finding creative, bold solutions for both housing needs and support services.
- We value an inclusive process that respects all points of view and a balanced approach to the issues.
- We value education and advocacy and its power to impact public policy in ways that achieve a vision of a community without homelessness.

COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Ambassador Josiah Horton Beeman, Community Services Board

Mrs. Marlene Blum, Citizen

Ron Christian, Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority

Mr. Louis Edwards, Citizen

Ms. Donna Foster, Citizen

Rev. Clevester Hawkins, Faith in Action, The First Baptist Church of Vienna

Ms. Carol Hawn, Federation of Citizen's Association

Mr. Verdia L. Haywood, Deputy County Executive

Mr. Dean Klein, Freddie Mac Foundation

Ms. Jane Kornblut, Citizen

Ms. Sheri Link, VCH Board & North Star Network

Ms. Pam Mitchell, New Hope Housing

Mr. G. Bud Pope, VOA-Bailey's Community Shelter

Ms. Lynn Thomas, Christian Relief Services

Ms. Sarah White, Our Daily Bread

Mr. Peyton Whiteley, Legal Services of Northern Virginia

Ms. Linda Wimpey, FACETS